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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 04 CONAKRY 000101

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C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (DECLASSIFICATION DATE AND REASON)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/30/2016

TAGS: PREL PGOV MASS KDEM GV

SUBJECT: GUINEAN MILITARY SEES BROAD SECURITY MANDATE;  
AMBIGUOUS SIGNALS ON INTERVENTION DURING  
PRESIDENTIAL TRANSITION

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Classified By:DCM Julie Winn for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

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Summary  
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¶1. (S) On January 24, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Defense (DASD) Theresa Whelan met with Prime Minister Cellou Dalein Diallo and then with senior military officers to discuss regional stability and bilateral military cooperation.

¶2. (S) DASD Whelan delivered a strong message to Guinean military leaders that U.S. assistance would be compromised if the military intervened in an extra-constitutional manner in the presidential transition. Guinea's highest-ranking military officers responded that their mandate is to ensure Guinea's territorial integrity and guarantee the safety and survival of the Guinean people -- a broad view that would permit significant flexibility of action. They underscored, however, that the Guinean armed forces are and will remain loyal to the republic.

¶3. (C) The delegations also reviewed areas for potential U.S. military cooperation. End Summary.

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Prime Minister Focuses on Costs of Regional Instability  
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¶4. (C) Prime Minister Diallo expressed gratitude for the long and productive military relationship between Guinea and the U.S., citing U.S. political, diplomatic and military support to ward off the incursion by Charles Taylor's forces in 2000-2001. The Prime Minister recalled that President Conte has dispatched him to Washington to seek the USG's support just after Charles Taylor and the RUF invaded Guinea. DASD Whelan noted that the program to create and train Guinea's Ranger battalion was successful because both parties had brought something to the table.

¶5. (C) The Prime Minister focused on the need for collaboration to secure peace in the sub-region. He perceived the region as a whole, where actions in one country directly affected the others. He said the successes we enjoy now in Sierra Leone and Liberia reinforce the values of freedom and democracy, which in turn support peace in the region. Guinea remains open to

engagement and wants to strengthen these values, he said. DASD Whelan recognized the important role that Guinea plays in the region and noted that the U.S. is taking a regional approach by focusing on the development of the ECOWAS stand-by force.

¶ 16. (C) The Prime Minister underscored the economic costs of regional instability -- Guinea's previous World Bank and IMF programs fell off track because of the high national defense expenditures it was forced to make to repel Charles Taylor's aggression. This had a disastrous effect on Guinea's fiscal and monetary indicators, triggering the economic and social crisis that continues today. Since Guinea had fallen off track with the IMF, budgetary support was suspended and, even worse, Guinea had not qualified for HIPC debt cancellation.

¶ 17. (C) The Prime Minister asked for DASD Whelan's views on Cote d'Ivoire. She expressed concern with the stalemate that continues to cause an economic, political, and social drain on the region. The Prime Minister noted the unwillingness of Ivoirian President Laurent Gbagbo to compromise. The only way to relieve the stalemate would be to force Gbagbo to "play the game" or to remove him from the equation, he said.

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Guinea Brings out the Big Guns to Request U.S. Assistance  
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¶ 18. (C) Twenty of Guinea's highest-ranking military officers, average age approximately 65, flanked by about 15 somewhat younger junior officers, received DASD Whelan, her team, and the Ambassador at the Ministry of Defense. MOD Director of Cabinet (and de facto Defense Minister) Colonel Kandet Toure echoed the Prime Minister's gratitude for U.S. military engagement, the training of officers under IMET, and the assistance to Guinea in the defense of its borders. Colonel Toure averred that Guinea's army is neither aggressive nor out for domination, but that it must be

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ready for any situation.

¶ 19. (C) To this end, the Army Inspector General, Colonel Ibrahima Diallo, outlined a wish list covering six areas of critical need where U.S. assistance would be most helpful.

-- The military's first priority is preparing for its contribution of a 750-strong infantry battalion to the ECOWAS stand-by brigade. The Guinean military requested U.S. assistance to prepare its battalion in the areas of health (laboratories and ambulances), communications (HF, VHF, and walkie-talkies), subsistence (clothing, bedding, furniture, and allowances), civil engineering (training and equipping a transportation unit; cranes, and small tools).

Five additional areas for potential mil-to-mil cooperation included:

-- renovation of airfields in border areas to prepare for troop deployment; air security equipment;

-- infrared, night-vision, and GPS equipment to improve the Guinean military's capacity to control its borders with Cote d'Ivoire and Liberia;

-- maintenance and repair of Guinea's naval assets, e.g., barges, patrol boats;

-- communications equipment, both fixed and mobile stations;

-- training of trainers for the Ranger battalion.

Col. Diallo added that civil-military relations are also critical to their mission.

¶10. (C) DASD Whelan noted that the U.S. had already provided equipment and medical training to the Ranger battalion. While the U.S. has made an investment in the Rangers, additional training for them is not readily available at this time. However, she added, there are potentially several areas where the U.S. can assist. For example, due to the U.S. commitment to the African Union and the ECOWAS stand-by force, we will seek ways to help make Guinea's contribution effective.

¶11. (C) DASD Whelan recalled our commitment to repair the dry dock we supplied in 1991. She thought that we might be able to contribute to the maintenance of U.S.-provided patrol boats. She said, with DOD's focus on maritime security and control of territorial waters, we welcome Guinea's efforts to build a capable navy. Whelan praised the military's effective use of the IMET program, reflected in Guinea's rank as the fifth-largest recipient of IMET funds in sub-Saharan Africa. She said we would explore ways to expand IMET. Whelan and the Guineans agreed that they look forward to increasing the cooperative mil-to-mil partnership.

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Leaders Warned of Consequences of Military Interference

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¶12. (S) Following the large session, the U.S. side requested a more restricted meeting. In attendance were four of Guinea's top military officers: General Kerfalla Camara, Chief of Defense Staff; General Alhousseiny Fofana, Advisor to the Ministry of Defense; Colonel Kandet Toure, de facto Minister of Defense; and General Kaba 43 Camara, Chief of the Army. The U.S. side consisted of DASD Whalen, the Ambassador, Colonel Victor Nelson, and Pol/Econ Chief Jessica Davis Ba (notetaker).

¶13. (S) DASD Whelan noted that when we discuss future engagement, it is critical also to address potential impediments to collaboration. She expressed optimism about the future of the region, including Sierra Leone and Liberia. Even with the continued problems in Liberia, the U.S. believes in and is committed to lasting stability in the Mano River region. Continued U.S.-Guinea military cooperation is critical to this progress, she said.

¶14. (S) Alluding to the presidential transition, DASD Whelan stated that at some point in the future, Guinea will face a significant change in its political landscape.  
(Comment: It was clear to all parties that DASD Whelan was

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referring to the eventual death of President Conte.) At that point, the Guinean military would have important decisions to make. All Guineans, Guinea's neighbors, as well as the United States and the world, would closely watch these decisions.

¶15. (S) DASD Whelan emphasized that she had been personally involved in all decisions regarding U.S. military assistance to Guinea since the late 1980s  
(Comment: Generally suspicious and rebuffing "outside" interference, the officers responded favorably to Whelan's personal involvement and experience with Guinea.) DASD Whelan said that, as a friend to the Guinean military, she wanted to be sure all parties were aware that any military actions with regard to the presidential succession outside the framework of the constitution would trigger negative consequences from the United States. We would be compelled to suspend U.S.-Guinea cooperation in almost all sectors, including military cooperation. DASD concluded, "You will make your decisions, but I must explain clearly that

certain decisions will compromise our cooperation."

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View from Top Brass: Mandate is Defense of the People  
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¶116. (S) The military leaders took detailed notes with no perceptible reaction when DASD Whelan broached this once taboo topic. They clearly understood the Ambassador's verbatim translation of Whelan's remarks and the warning against military intervention. General Kerfalla Camara then removed his glasses, sat back in his chair and made his first comments of the afternoon: "The Guinean army is and will remain republican," i.e., the Army is an institution of the Republic of Guinea, governed by its laws.

¶117. (S) General Kerfalla continued, "Since its creation in 1958, the army has not been one of conquest or repression, but one that acts in the exclusive service of its people. Our mandate is to guarantee the safety and survival of Guinea's citizens. This army was called upon to reestablish peace in Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea Bissau, and since 1960 we have ensured stability in the region. The president (Conte) is a real soldier. He has instructed us not to overstep one inch of our border unless invited by that neighboring country." Kerfalla repeated, "Since its creation, the mission of Guinea's military is to defend the security of our people and its borders. In training our soldiers to fight, it is only for the benefit and protection of our people. The mandate of the armed forces is to defend its people. We have no other ambition."

¶118. (S) Colonel Kandet Toure said he appreciated the sincerity and openness of DASD Whelan's message and that he could not improve upon General Kerfalla's response. "We can assure you, those who are here before you are officers who have taken an oath to the people of Guinea. General Kerfalla's statement represents the position of each member of our party. We will be more vigilant now so that we can handle any situation which may arise." Colonel Toure invited closer and more permanent communication, suggesting that the U.S. might see dangers that Guinean military leadership itself is not aware of. We are at your disposal, he said. Colonel Toure also alluded at one point to his imperfect knowledge of what was happening "among the lieutenants."

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Colonel Toure Clarifies His View of the Army's Role  
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¶119. (S) While onboard the C-12 with DASD Whelan from Conakry to Kankan, the Ambassador spoke with Colonel Kandet Toure (a) to ensure that DASD Whelan's message the previous day had fully registered and (b) to probe further about what the Guinean military leadership meant by the phrase "we are and will remain a republican army."

¶120. (S) Colonel Toure said that Guinea needed peace as a prerequisite for its social and economic development. Toure said he also "needed peace" because he did not, as a senior military official, want to find himself facing conflict in his own country. The examples of neighboring Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Cote d'Ivoire had convinced

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Classified By: DCM Julie Winn for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d). everyone of the disastrous consequences of civil conflict.

¶121. (S) Referring to DASD Whelan's message the previous day, the Ambassador said that the U.S. was not singling Guinea out and that the U.S. policy against coups and extra-constitutional transitions applies broadly, as

evidenced by our position on Mauritania. Colonel Toure said he understood.

¶122. (S) The Ambassador said that the term "republican army" (armee republicaine) used by General Kerfalla the previous day was difficult to translate precisely into English. He asked Colonel Toure what, in his view, the term implied. Toure responded that a "republican army" is one that remains loyal to the people, respectful of the laws of the land, and defends the country's territorial integrity. The Ambassador asked specifically whether the laws of the land, in Colonel Toure's view, included the constitution. Toure responded, "Of course."

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Government Leaders Also Focused on Maintaining Stability  
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¶123. (U) At a reception hosted by the Ambassador, DASD Whelan and her team had the opportunity to engage with civilian leaders, including President of the National Assembly (and constitutional successor to the President of the Republic) Aboubacar Sompore and Minister of Territorial Administration Kiridi Bangoura. The most senior military leaders attended the reception as well.

¶124. (SBU) DASD Whelan and Sompore discussed developments in the region and the possibilities for increased trade with Liberia now that it has turned over a new leaf. Sompore noted that the economic development of Guinea was directly linked with that of its neighbors. Cote d'Ivoire remains the dark spot on the horizon. Sompore emphasized the heavy toll of Ivoirian refugees and the risk of compromise and instability in the border region.

¶125. (SBU) Kiridi Bangoura spoke about the December local elections and his recent travel to all of Guinea's regions to consolidate lessons learned. The most important challenge, he said, was educating the winners and losers on their role in a democratic system and the role all actors must play in the success of newly elected municipal and local governments.

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COMMENT  
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¶126. (S) As highlighted by President Lansana Conte's granting a rare meeting the next day (septel), the Guineans viewed DASD Whelan's visit as an important chance to engage with the U.S. on bilateral military cooperation. Moreover, there is increasingly open discussion and sub rosa maneuvering in Guinea regarding the once taboo subject of the inevitable presidential transition. The challenge is to ensure that such planning -- whether by the military or civilian political leaders -- remains constitutional and constructive. The Guinean military heard DASD Whelan's message. The Guinean military's view of their mandate is very broad, however, and may be broad enough to justify in their eyes a range of actions when Conte dies or even before. Colonel Toure's remarks about the army's respect for the laws of the land, including the constitution, were somewhat reassuring, but he may not have the last word.

¶127. (U) This cable was cleared by DASD Whelan.

McDONALD